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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 005794

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: CIUDAD BOLIVAR VIOLENCE DECLINING

REF: A. BOGOTA 4959

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 4962

Classified By: Charge Milton K. Drucker; reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: "Ciudad Bolivar," a sector of underprivileged neighborhoods located in southeastern Bogota, has long been notorious for violence and disorder. In May, staffers from Mayor Garzon's office told Poloffs that the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) had infiltrated the area. High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour expressed similar concerns during her visit to Colombia the same month. However, during a June 13 briefing and tour, Police Commander Rusingue denied that illegal armed groups (other than gangs and common criminals) had a presence in the area. He noted that police programs to establish community confidence and a law enforcement presence had been largely successful; although he conceded that homicide, sexual assault, and juvenile delinquency rates remained problematic. Emboffs found no visible evidence of a paramilitary presence during the visit. End Summary.

2 (C) On June 13, Emboffs traveled with police escort to the section of Bogota known as "Ciudad Bolivar" to investigate reports of increased paramilitary presence. Ciudad Bolivar is a section of southeastern Bogota made up of roughly 470 small, unregistered neighborhoods and an estimated one million residents. The poverty, informal economy, and relative isolation from police presence has given the area a reputation for extreme urban violence. In May, officials from Mayor Garzon's office told Poloffs that Ciudad Bolivar, Suba, and Kennedy neighborhoods had a surge in violence and an increase in local paramilitary control this year (Ref A). High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour told diplomats she had reliable reports of the same during her May 12-14 visit (Ref B).

[1](#)3. (U) Police Liaison to the Diplomatic Community, Major Santiago Camelo, accompanied Emboffs to the station with an additional car of undercover protection. Despite the security measures, Camelo assured Emboffs that Ciudad Bolivar had improved significantly during the Uribe Administration. Police Major Henry Horacio Rusingue, Commander of the area police force, backed up Camelo's impression with statistics. He expressed his support for Uribe's Democratic Security Strategy and said it had contributed to crime reduction in Bogota. He compared the first five months of 2004 to 2005 and showed that armed robbery, auto theft and personal injury had declined significantly in 2005. Rusingue did note his concern about the homicide rate, which is up by 24 percent to 133 murders so far this year, and domestic sexual assault, which is grossly underreported, but asserted that he anticipated improvement in both over the next few months.

[1](#)4. (U) Rusingue denied charges that the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) Capital Bloc had taken control of the area. He said some criminals had claimed a paramilitary connection, but none of those arrested actually had ties to the AUC. Illegal armed groups did not have known recruiting programs in the area, but acknowledged that the poverty and lack of infrastructure left the area vulnerable to gangs and other illegal activities. To combat the trend, the Ciudad Bolivar Police have positioned 512 police officers in the 475 neighborhoods in the area. Rusingue said they hoped to have 800 officers in the area by the end of the year. The officers patrol commercial areas, man stationary reporting posts, investigate crimes, receive complaints, deliver water to remote neighborhoods, and teach children in two police-administered schools founded by Police General Castro Castro. Rusingue claimed that the police efforts to establish ties to the community had paid off) roughly 3,500 citizens belonged to the citizen watch program over 1,700 just a year ago. He noted that he hoped the youth programs would also have a positive effect since over 1,100 minors were arrested in Ciudad Bolivar so far this year.

[1](#)5. (U) Although the mayor's office expressed concern about the violence in Ciudad Bolivar, Rusingue noted that no one had visited the area or asked police about the situation. Emboffs visited multiple neighborhoods on a driving tour and saw no visible signs of a paramilitary presence (such as signs, posters, or graffiti), roadblocks, or recruitment programs in the area. Rusingue suggested that concerns about AUC presence sprung from a political dispute between Mayor Garzon and President Uribe over governance and demobilization

policy rather than actual crime levels. Rusingue also grumbled that the Colombian Army had a small presence on the outskirts of Ciudad Bolivar to hold press conferences but the police did the actual long-term work. He confirmed, however, that his unit usually had all necessary resources, thanks in part to frequent media coverage on violence there.

16. (C) Comment: Although Ciudad Bolivar remains a dangerous section of Bogota, it appeared far from the lawless wasteland portrayed by the mayor's staffers. End Comment.
DRUCKER